

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 13, Section X Paragraphs 1–8

Release from Guilt (Part 1)

Overview

The overall message of this section is that the way to be released from guilt is to release others. As you identify with the mercy of God, you come to recognize His Love as your true Self.

Guilt is nothing more than an insane game of the ego. The guilt we see in others is nothing but the guilt in our own mind, *displaced* onto the world. The guilt within us is an illusion also, but by projecting it onto the world we make it seem to be real. Believing our guilt to be real and solid, we have blocked our awareness of God's Love within us, both His love for us and ours for Him.

We have used our relationships as private dumping grounds for imaginary guilt. No real relationship can exist if guilt is part of it. To have a real relationship, we must give it to the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to use the relationship for the purpose of healing guilt. Instead of using the relationship to displace guilt, concealing the guilt but keeping it, we need to let the Holy Spirit expose the guilt and truly release us from it.

We will never be rid of guilt entirely until we have learned that it is insane, wholly unjustified, and wholly without reason.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹You are accustomed to the notion that the mind can see the source of pain where it is not. ²The doubtful service of such displacement is to hide the **real** source of [your] guilt, and **keep** from your awareness the full perception **that it is insane**. ³Displacement **always** is maintained by the illusion that the source of ~~guilt~~, from which attention is diverted, **must be true**; and **must be fearful**, or you would not have displaced the guilt onto what you believed to be **less** fearful. ⁴You are therefore willing [with little opposition] to look upon all kinds of "sources," [underneath awareness,] provided they are not the deeper source, to which they bear no real relationship at all. [Insane ideas *have no real relationships, for that is why they are insane.*] {The first line of the next paragraph really belongs here.}

• **Study Question** •

- 1) (a) “Displacement” (1:2, 3) is another word for what familiar Course term?
- (b) What “doubtful service” does displacement serve, in the ego’s plan?
- (c) What illusion maintains displacement?

When the Course asserts something about what we think or the way we think, as it does in sentence 1, it seems to be veering toward over-generalization. “Maybe,” we think, “most people think this way, but I’m not sure I do.” We may even be very certain we are *not* included in the Course’s blanket assertion. When I think about it, however, I’m inclined to believe that Jesus is far more likely to know how we think than we ourselves are.

What is he asserting about us here? He says that we *displace* pain and guilt (1:1–2). We attribute these things to some source outside of our own minds. This is the same thing we have often discussed under the name of *projection*. The difference in the two terms, in my opinion, is a difference in the aspect of the act that is emphasized. In projection, the emphasis is on the *thing* being cast out of our mind: We project our *guilt* onto another person. In displacement, the emphasis is more on the *location* of the thing being projected: We displace the source of our guilt *from* our mind *to* another person. The change in words occurs here, I think, because the point that Jesus wants to make is not about our guilt itself, but on the way we wrongfully identify the *source* of our pain and guilt.

Our minds choose to deceive themselves about the source of their pain and guilt for a reason. We get something out of it, and what we get is “to hide the real source of guilt” (1:2). This isn’t particularly healthy, but we want to hide the real source because we are afraid of it (1:3). Think for a moment about the things you believe are allied against you, the things you blame for your guilt or pain. They may include things like war and terrorism, sickness and death, irritating family members, and so on. Think about the aversion you feel for all these things, and then let yourself realize that, however great may be your fear of these, your fear of your own mind’s guilt is far greater! (1:3–4).

It’s a familiar litany in the Course. We think we have wronged God; we believe that we have ripped our very life away from Him, and thus have incurred His wrath. Deep in our minds, we believe we are profoundly guilty, so guilty we cannot bear to know about it. We hide that source of guilt by displacing it on other people and things around us. Anything will do as long as it is not the real source (1:4).

Paragraph 2¹

2. ¹Insane ideas **have** no real relationships, for that is why they **are**

¹ If you are reading the first edition of the Course, some crucial words were omitted from this paragraph. In the second edition, the words “pure. If you pre-empt” are modified to the form given in the original scribing: “pure. If you displace your guilt upon them, the Holy Spirit cannot use them. For, by pre-empting”.

insane. ²No real relationship can rest on guilt, or even hold one spot of it to mar its purity. ³For all relationships that guilt has touched are used but to avoid the person *and* the guilt. ⁴What strange relationships you have made for this strange purpose! ⁵And you forgot that real relationships are holy, and cannot be used by **you** at all. ⁶They are used **only** by the Holy Spirit, and it is that which **makes** them pure. ⁷If you displace **your** guilt upon them, the Holy Spirit cannot use them. ⁸For, by pre-empting **for your own** ends what you should have given **Him**, He cannot use it [them] for **your** release. ⁹No one who would unite in **any** way with **anyone** for his individual [his own] salvation will find it in that strange relationship. ¹⁰It is not shared, and so it is not real.

• Study Question •

2. (a) *What purpose is given to relationships by the ego?*
(b) *What makes a holy relationship holy?*

Here we make one of those cognitive leaps that the Course finds so natural and that seem strange to us: We switch from talking about the relationship of *ideas* in sentence 1 to talking about interpersonal relationships in the rest of the paragraph. The switch is a logical one for the Course because it views all of us as ideas in God's mind. When two people who are thinking insanely (that is, following the ego's line of thought) try to relate, the result is doomed to failure because insane ideas cannot relate (2:1).

The ego's basic insanity is that it believes completely that guilt is real. Guilt prevents relationship (2:2). How can I recognize my union with you if I am guilty about how I treat you, or if I hold you guilty for your interactions with me? Ego-controlled people use relationships to dump guilt on one another (2:3), which necessitates keeping one's distance from the other person. You can't truly connect and still displace your guilt!

Think about the way you use your relationships to alleviate your guilt (2:4). Jesus calls these "strange relationships" with a "strange purpose." Some of our so-called relationships are really twisted, aren't they? The Course is telling us that what we call relationships are not really relationships at all. We are not relating, we are *avoiding* relationship. We are hiding our own guilt by finding someone else to blame for our distress.

Real relationships, which the Course calls *holy relationships*, do not serve the ego's purposes; no games are played in them with the "hot potato" of guilt. Relationships are characterized by *joining*, a quality of oneness, which is a quality of God. Course students ask over and over what makes a relationship a *holy* relationship. The answer is given here in unequivocal terms: What makes relationships holy is that "they are used only by the Holy Spirit" (2:6). If I am using a relationship for any individual purpose of my own, to that degree it isn't holy (2:5,9). If it isn't shared it isn't real (2:10). That means that in a holy relationship I do not dump guilt on my relationship partner; I do not see guilt in

her, or him, at all (2:7). It only makes sense. How could *guilt* be a part of something *holy*? The two words are mutually exclusive.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹In any union with a brother in which you seek to lay **your** guilt upon him, or share it **with** him or perceive his own, **you will feel guilty**. ²Nor will you find satisfaction and peace with him, because your union with him **is not real**. ³You will see guilt in that relationship **because you put it there**. ⁴It is inevitable that those who suffer guilt **will** attempt to displace it, because they **do** believe in it. ⁵Yet though they suffer, they will not look within **and let it go**. ⁶They cannot know they love, and cannot understand **what loving is**. ⁷Their main concern is to perceive the source of guilt **outside** themselves, **beyond** their own control.

• Study Question •

3. Describe the typical pattern regarding guilt in an unholy relationship.

No relationship that you are using to displace your guilt onto your relationship partner will bring you peace; instead, it will just make you more guilty (3:1–2). Peace comes through a relationship when it brings you an experience of oneness; a guilt-ridden relationship can never do that. Note here that there are three different ways in which guilt can be exchanged in a relationship, and all of them produce more guilt: *shifting* guilt (making your partner the scapegoat for your own guilt); *sharing* guilt (accepting guilt in both parties); or *supporting* guilt (reinforcing your partner's self-condemnation). It does not matter whether guilt is yours, theirs, or community property; perceive any guilt, in any form, and you will destroy your peace in the relationship and feel guilty because you have done so. All the guilt you see is coming from your mind (3:3).

If a person feels guilty “it is inevitable that [they] will attempt to displace it” (3:4), just as a person who picks up a red-hot pan will drop it. Guilt hurts when we believe it is real, so we try to get rid of it. Getting rid of guilt is actually a good thing! Our only mistake is using the wrong method of guilt eradication. We try to offload our guilt onto someone else instead of simply acknowledging its presence in us and letting it go (3:4–5). When we are trying to make the people around us guilty, we cannot love them; we have to see them as adversaries of some sort. We cannot recognize the love that is our nature because we are too busy projecting our supposed guilt (3:6–7). So harboring guilt prevents us from recognizing our true, divine nature, which is exactly why the ego loves to keep us playing with guilt.

Guilt that is in your mind, originating there, is something *you can control*. Guilt that is outside you, in other people, is something you cannot control (3:7). The ego's ploy, teaching us to project guilt and see it outside of us, is very cleverly designed, because it convinces us that we cannot do anything about guilt. When we acknowledge that the guilt, the anger, the hatred, and the pain are all coming

from us, we can finally begin to deal with it. This is why the Course keeps telling us to look within ourselves, and to recognize that all of this is coming from inside, not outside:

That is why you must realize that your hatred is in your mind and not outside it before you can get rid of it; and why you must get rid of it before you can perceive the world as it really is (T-12.III.7:10).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹When you maintain that **you** are guilty but the source of your guilt **lies in the past**, you are **not** looking inward. ²The past is **not in you**. ³Your weird associations to it **have** no meaning in the present. ⁴Yet you let them stand **between** you and your brothers, with whom you find no **real** relationships at all. ⁵Can you **expect** to use your brothers as a means to “solve” the past, and still to see them as they really **are**? ⁶Salvation is not found by those who use their brothers to resolve problems **that are not there**. ⁷You wanted not salvation in the past. ⁸Would you impose your idle wishes on the present, and hope to find salvation **now**?

• Study Question •

- 4) *Another way we attempt to displace guilt is by seeing its cause in the past, and then using our brothers as a means to “solve” our past.*
- (a) *What effect does this have in the present on our relationships?*
- (b) *Why won't this approach work?*
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Sometimes the ego can trick us into doing something similar to what the Course calls for, but something that actually increases our guilt and despair. I recall one workshop I attended in which one woman kept lamenting over and over about things she had done in the past, and how guilty she felt for doing them. That is not looking inward, the Course says (4:1), because “The past is not *in you*” (4:2). Seeing our guilt and owning it means seeing it *in the present*, not the past; it means seeing that I am generating this guilt right now. It has nothing to do with the past, whatever I may think (4:3). What is insane is allowing something from the past, something which does not even exist in the present, to stand between me and another person who loves me, and whom I love (4:4).

When I am dragging my “guilty past” into the present and allowing it to disrupt my relationship with someone, it is a *present choice*. I don't have to do that. For instance, suppose I had a father who was closed off to me emotionally, and never displayed love for me. This left me with feelings of anger and betrayal, or abandonment. I carry about some guilt for these unloving feelings I have toward my father (who may no longer be alive).

Then, in the present, I enter into a relationship. I see, or imagine I see, patterns in my partner that remind me of my father and trigger that sleeping anger and hurt. I project the shadow image of my father onto my partner, and

now, in the present, I begin to use this partner to try to resolve my problems with my father. (The Text previously mentioned shadow figures in T-13.V, and returns to the subject in great detail in T-17.III.) How can I possibly expect to see my brother accurately when I have superimposed my father's image on him (4:5-6)? We therefore end up fighting imaginary battles with distorted images of people, and repeating the same patterns that loaded us with guilt in the past (4:7-8). Instead of ridding ourselves of guilt, we riddle ourselves with it.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Determine, then, to be **not** as you were. ²Use no relationship to hold you to the past, but with each one each day be born again. ³A minute, even less, will be enough to free you from the past, and give your mind in peace over to the Atonement. ⁴When everyone is welcome to you as you would have **yourself** be welcome to your Father, you will see no guilt in you. ⁵For you will have **accepted** the Atonement, which shone within you all the while you dreamed of guilt, and would not look within and **see it**.

• Study Question •

- 5) *Sentence 3 is suggestive of pausing for a holy instant, in which we give our minds over to the Atonement. Explain in your own words what you think the next sentence means.*



This paragraph describes how we are to react in our relationships with regard to releasing from guilt. We should discard our past behavior, which involved shifting, sharing, or supporting guilt (5:1). We should enter into each relationship each day with a fresh new start, as though there were no past, and we should not drag the past into it (5:2). When the past rises up to bring guilt into the relationship, we can pause for a holy instant and seek peace in God's presence, reminding ourselves of the Atonement, which is God's promise of perfect innocence for everyone (5:3). We let go of the past and remember the eternal present, in which God's Son is still the perfectly holy being God created. We recognize that no one is guilty, and we open our heart and mind in love to our brother or sister. We are learning to do this with one person after another, seeing in them the innocence we want God to see in us. When we have reached the point of seeing *everyone* as innocent, we will see ourselves without guilt (5:4). That is what comprises the process of accepting the Atonement (5:5).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹As long as you believe that guilt is justified in **any** way, in **anyone**, **whatever** he may do, you will not look within, where you would **always** find Atonement. ²The end of guilt will never come as long as you believe **there is a reason for it**. ³For you must learn that guilt is **always** totally insane, and **has** no reason. ⁴The Holy Spirit seeks not to dispel

reality. ⁵If **guilt** were real, **Atonement** would not be. ⁶The purpose of Atonement is to dispel illusions, **not** to establish them as real and **then** forgive them. [The Holy Spirit does not *keep* illusions in your mind to frighten you, and show them to you fearfully, to demonstrate what He has saved you from.] {Again, the first sentence of the next paragraph belongs with this paragraph.}

• **Study Question** •

- 6) (a) According to this paragraph, what keeps us from looking within and finding Atonement?
(b) Pick a sentence, or part of a sentence, from this paragraph that seems to you to sum up its message.

To me, no other paragraph in the Course states quite so forcefully the utter disdain and abhorrence the Course has for guilt. It must be completely expunged from our minds in any way, shape, or form. The tiniest perception of guilt in another that we cling to will totally block our sight of the light of our own innocence (6:1). That is why we have to completely forgive everyone to discover that we are forgiven. “When you forgive the world your guilt, you will be free of it” (T-27.VIII.13:2).

Notice that what the Course opposes so vehemently here is our belief that our perception of guilt is reasonable and justified (6:1–3). We look at a person who has lied to us and feel entirely justified in thinking, “He is guilty.” We look at a person who has betrayed our trust and think it is reasonable to remain angry and to withhold love from that person. As long as we think like that we will never be free from our own guilt. If there is good reason for guilt anywhere, there is good reason for it in *us*. We have to come to the recognition that “guilt is *always* totally insane, and *has* no reason” (6:3). It simply isn’t real. If God were really keeping count of our sins we’d all be doomed to hell, as the fundamentalists say we are, and no magical substitute sacrifice could save us (6:5). If it is real, sin cannot be forgiven.

When you are tempted to believe that sin is real, remember this: If sin is real, both God and you are not. If creation is extension, the Creator must have extended Himself, and it is impossible that what is part of Him is totally unlike the rest. If sin is real, God must be at war with Himself. He must be split, and torn between good and evil; partly sane and partially insane. For He must have created what wills to destroy Him, and has the power to do so. Is it not easier to believe that you have been mistaken than to believe in this (T-19.III.6:1-6).

The only way to be totally free of guilt is to recognize that there is *never* any reason to be guilty.

There is a huge difference between the Course’s understanding of Atonement and the traditional Christian understanding. The traditional teaching is that sin is real, guilt is real, but that Jesus suffered the wrath of God in our place, and now our sins can be forgiven. The Course’s teaching is that sin is an illusion (this whole world of separation is no more than a dream, not real at all, and therefore

all that seems to happen here is equally unreal), guilt has no reason, and for that reason alone, sins can be forgiven (6:6).

The Holy Spirit doesn't see sin and guilt as real (final sentence), and neither should we. (There seems to me to be a bit of humorous parody in this sentence, lightly making fun of the way some Christian preachers dwell on "hellfire and brimstone," to frighten people into Heaven. "Better accept Jesus, or you'll burn in hell.")

Paragraph 7

7. ¹The Holy Spirit does not **keep** illusions in your mind to frighten you, and show them to you fearfully to demonstrate what He has saved you **from**. ²**What He has saved you from is gone**. ³Give **no** reality to guilt, and see **no** reason for it. ⁴The Holy Spirit does what God would have Him do, and has **always** done so. ⁵He has **seen** separation, but **knows** of union. ⁶He **teaches** healing, but He also **knows** of creation. ⁷He would have you see and teach as He does, and through Him. ⁸Yet what He knows you do **not** know, though it is yours.

• Study Question •

7. (a) *The activity of the Holy Spirit on two levels (within the dream, and in Heaven) is clearly seen in the last half of this paragraph. He "knows" of union and of creation (things on the Heavenly level); what does He "see," and what does He "teach" (on the earthly level)?*
(b) *Although we do not "know" creation and union as He does, how is our function to be like His?*

The admonition in sentence 3 is succinct and unmistakably clear: "Give no reality to guilt, and see no reason for it" (7:3).

The Holy Spirit has a foot in both Heaven and earth, and that is clearly seen in 7:4–6. Remember how "healing" and "creation" have been identified with earth and Heaven respectively in previous sections (T-12.VII.4:7). Each of the sentences here presents one aspect that relates to the earth and to illusion, and another aspect that relates to truth and to Heaven. He wants us to emulate Him (7:7) here in the illusory world: Still seeing the separate beings (illusion) around us, but teaching the truth behind the illusion. What the Holy Spirit sees and teaches is related to this world; what He *knows* is related to Heaven. He knows what we do not know (7:8); therefore, we must draw upon His power to carry out our function here. That it what it means that we "see and teach...through Him" (7:7).

Paragraph 8

8. ¹*Now* it is given you to heal and teach, to make what will be *now* [*will be, now*]. ²As yet it is **not** now. ³The Son of God believes that he is lost in guilt, alone in a dark world where pain is pressing everywhere upon him

from without. ⁴When he has looked within and seen the radiance there, he will remember how much his Father loves him. ⁵And it will seem incredible that he ever thought his Father loved him not, and looked upon him as condemned. ⁶The moment that you realize **guilt is insane, wholly unjustified and wholly without reason, you will not** fear to look upon the Atonement and **accept it wholly.**

• **Study Question** •

- 8) (a) *What will bring us to the point of remembering how much the Father loves us?*
(b) *Sentence 5 reiterates an idea from paragraph 6. What must we realize before we can look within and find Atonement?*

Our mission is to heal and teach. This will “make what *will be now*” (8:1). That is, it will bring into the present world something that seems to be still in the future, and of Heaven: “As yet it is *not now*” (8:2). This is probably a reference to the guiltless world, or the real world. As a whole, the Son of God is still in the dark, still wallowing in guilt. Our mission is to proclaim his innocence until every aspect of his mind accepts that innocence and awakens to the realization of “how much his Father loves him” (8:4).

The words of sentence 6 seem marvelous when we apply them to ourselves. What a relief to be told our guilt is a lie! But the thing we need to remember is this: Unless we, with equal joy, apply these words to everyone we know, we will never know it for ourselves. The moment spoken of in the final sentence is not the moment when I recognize the insanity of perceiving guilt in myself, it is the moment when I recognize the insanity of perceiving guilt in anyone. Then, and only then, will I be free.

Answer Key

- 1) (a) Projection.
(b) It hides the real source of guilt and keeps us from perceiving that guilt is insane.
(c) The illusion that the source of our inner guilt must be true and terrifying.
- 2) (a) The ego uses relationships to avoid the person and the guilt, by displacing our guilt onto the other person.
(b) Giving the relationship to the Holy Spirit, to be used for His purpose, which is always our release from guilt.
- 3) In an unholy relationship, when one person feels guilt, they seek to lay that guilt on the other person, or share it, or see the other person's guilt. Their main concern is to see the guilt as outside of themselves.
- 4) (a) We cannot find a real relationship with them. We see them in a distorted fashion, through the past.
(b) If we didn't want salvation in the past, bringing the past into the present will only produce more of the same thing.
- 5) We will see ourselves as free from guilt when we see everyone as free from guilt; we are to treat everyone with the same mercy that we want God to show to us, and until we do, we will not experience that mercy ourselves.
- 6) (a) A belief that guilt is justified in some form, in some people, for some actions.
(b) "Guilt is always totally insane, and has no reason."
- 7) (a) He sees separation and He teaches healing.
(b) We, like Him, are also to see separation yet teach healing, doing so "through Him."
- 8) (a) Looking within and seeing the radiance there.
(b) That guilt is insane, wholly unjustified and wholly without reason.